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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000218

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SUBJECT: FADHILA LEADER JABIRI OUTLINES PLAN TO CAPTURE
PRIME MINISTERSHIP

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Fadhila Party leader Nadim al-Jabiri, a senior figure in the Shia Alliance, lunched with Ambassador on January 24 and outlined his candidacy for the prime ministership. Jabiri argued that he alone among the nominees for PM could count on support from the Sunni Arabs and Kurds. He said he is convinced that a consensus candidate is needed to save Iraq at this pivotal moment, stating that the Sunni Arabs need to be brought in to key positions in any new government. Jabiri criticized the Shia Alliance as gripped by an "opposition mentality" and asserted that he would withdraw his bloc from the Alliance rather than acquiesce to another Shia-Kurd governing monopoly.

12. (C) SUMMARY CONTINUED: Jabiri said he had conducted talks with Allawi, the Sunni lists, and several smaller groups and could pull together a 103-vote blocking coalition to prevent the Kurds and remaining Shia Alliance members from forming a two-thirds majority (183 votes). With that bold stroke, Jabiri said he believes that the Shia Alliance would re-evaluate his candidacy and that several groups within it would turn and back him. He agreed with the Ambassador on the idea for an Iraqi National Security Council that brings together top government figures on all key security questions. He believes Ayad Allawi should take on a senior security position in the next government, and he discussed the names of several prominent Sunni Arabs for key security positions. END SUMMARY.

13. (C) The Ambassador discussed the prospects for the next government at a January 24 lunch with Fadhila Party leader Nadim al-Jabiri, a senior figure in the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA).

The Candidate

14. (C) Jabiri told the Ambassador that his candidacy for PM is serious and that he considers himself the only possible consensus candidate for the position. Jabiri claimed that he alone could count on support from all segments of the Iraqi population. Jabiri, a former prominent political science professor at Baghdad University during the Saddam era, said that many rising politicians today were formerly his students. His status as a respected professor and non-exile who interacted extensively with Sunni Arabs and Ba'athists, he added, makes him uniquely equipped to deal with all Iraqis and understand the state of the country. He spoke at length about how repressive the past regime had been and how deeply ignorant the population is as a result of a long period of what amounted to solitary confinement. Jabiri also noted that he is close with the Sadrist Shaykh Muhammad Ya'acubi (the ideological father of the Fadhila Party as well as a

well-known Sadrists whose ties as a student of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr were so tight that many consider him -- and not Muqtada -- to be the late ayatollah's rightful heir). Jabiri argued that this tie to the Sadrists, combined with his ongoing relationship with Sunnis and Kurds, would make him a good consensus candidate.

15. (C) Jabiri said he had not considered seeking the prime ministership until he reviewed the qualifications of his rivals, saw their flaws, and decided that he personally had to lead a "project to save Iraq." Jabiri is convinced that the period ahead is pivotal and that victory is by no means assured. In his opinion, Iraq will either take a turn for the better or for the worse depending on the leadership that takes the helm in the months ahead and on the decisions it makes.

Problems With His Rivals

16. (C) Jabiri dismissed the qualifications of his rivals in the UIA for the prime ministership. Ja'afari is seen as sectarian and incompetent, he said, and Abd al-Mehdi is too close to Iran and SCIRI. Jabiri said that he issued a public challenge for any candidate for the prime ministership to allow either the Kurds or the Sunnis a veto over his candidacy, and he said only he could meet that challenge among the UIA candidates.

Problems with the UIA

17. (C) Jabiri stated that he is prepared to split from the
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UIA to keep his candidacy alive. He bitterly criticized the Shia Alliance as gripped by an "opposition mentality" that has led its members to alienate others, avoid national consensus, and act with excessive caution. The same mentality had complicated efforts to draft an acceptable constitution, he lamented. Jabiri, who previously told the Ambassador that the time is not right to scale back de-Ba'athification, this time said that he believes the De-Ba'athification Commission had overstepped its bounds in disqualifying elected parliamentarians and opposing a Saddam trial judge who clearly was not a Ba'athist.

How Jabiri Plans to Block The Opposition

18. (C) Jabiri said that he plans to block any efforts by the UIA and the Kurdistan Alliance to form a government on their own with a rival PM candidate. According to Jabiri, he controls 15-18 seats on the UIA list and could put together a blocking coalition that would add up to some 103 seats. Such a coalition, he maintained, would be large enough to prevent the remaining members of the UIA and the Kurdistan Alliance from reaching a two-thirds majority. (Note: A two-thirds majority requires a 183-member bloc in the 275 member parliament, hence 93 seats are needed to prevent a governing coalition). Jabiri claimed that he could count on support from the following parliamentarians for such a plan, adding their votes to his own 15 or so to form a bloc of at least 103:

- Tawaffuq (44)
- Allawi's list (25)
- Hewan Front (11)
- Kurdistan Islamic Union (5)
- Yezidi movement (1)
- Turcoman Front (1)
- Mithal Al-Alusi (1)

¶9. (C) (COMMENT: This appears to be a solid blocking coalition. Only 93 "no" votes are needed and Jabiri can rally some 103 "no" votes. Even if Jabiri were to lose the Kurdistan Islamic Union's 5 seats -- which could align with the Kurdistan Alliance -- he would still have 98 seats. The Shia and Kurds would need to lure 6 more parliamentarians away from him to form a government. They potentially could pick off Mithal al-Alusi and the Yezidi representative, but that would still leave a 96-vote bloc in place. The Shia and Kurds would have a tough time winning over the Turcoman representative and three more politicians from the ranks of Tawaffuq, Allawi, and the Hewan Front to form a government. Jabiri's plan could only fall apart if the UIA manages to dismantle his own Fadhila bloc, which would require money, pressure, and religious betrayal -- all of which have combined before in Iraq but are still somewhat difficult to bring together. END COMMENT)

How Jabiri Plans to Capture The Nomination

¶10. (C) Jabiri told the Ambassador that he is convinced that the internal dynamics in the UIA would shift dramatically once he makes good on his threat to block a Shia-Kurd alliance. At that point, Jabiri said, people would realize that his nomination is for real, not a bargaining tactic to secure more Fadhila ministries. Then, Jabiri added, he believes he may be able to sway the sizable Sadrists bloc in the UIA to his side (some 28 seats). (COMMENT: This would mean healing a well-known rift between Fadhila founder Shaykh Ya'acubi and Muqtada al-Sadr, both of whom claim to be heirs to the Sadrists legacy and leaders of the trend. END COMMENT.) Jabiri noted that the Da'wa Party, on the other hand, already is weak and pliable, and it would not have captured any seats at all had it not run on others' coattails within the UIA. Jabiri claimed that he has a strategic alliance with Allawi and believes that, if the Sunnis, Allawi, and the Kurds support him, the rest of the UIA will come around to the idea.

¶11. (C) Jabiri said that he sees Ayad Allawi as a security leader within a future Jabiri government, telling the Ambassador, "you read my mind," when the Ambassador presented the idea for an Iraqi National Security Council that joins the top figures in the government and makes all strategic security decisions. Jabiri recommended adding governors to such a body or drawing them in through a consultative committee. Jabiri agreed that Sunni Arabs needed to be treated in ways that addressed their "fears and their pride" after the end of some 1,400 years of dominance.

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¶12. (C) Jabiri also seconded the idea of dividing ministries into three baskets -- security, economy, and services -- and putting them under the supervision of three Deputy PMs or similar figures. He said that he had heard positive recommendations for Tourism Minister Hashim al-Hashimi and Culture Minister Nuri al-Rawi, both Sunni Arabs, to take on positions as Minister of Interior and Minister of Industry and Minerals, respectively. He also mentioned the prospect of promoting Sunni Arab Ministry of Interior Inspector General Nuri Nuri, a reportedly capable leader.
KHALILZAD